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ABSTRACT

In February 2000, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) cosponsored a national literacy summit of more than 100 representatives from the field of adult literacy and basic education in Washington, DC. During the summit, 29 adult literacy teachers from 5 states (Virginia, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Maine, and Delaware) participated in 5 focus groups. Each focus group worked to develop its own version of what the vision and goal of the summit agenda should be. The focus groups also ranked eight action strategies for achieving their chosen vision and goal. The following were mentioned by at least one focus group as being among its three most-desired strategies: include learners' perspectives; commitment to access; instructional and program quality improvements; professional development opportunities; and create partnerships. (Appendixes constituting approximately two-thirds of the document contain the following items: focus group notes on selected action steps; the NCSALL focus group guide that was developed to obtain teacher feedback for a national literacy summit draft action agenda; the form used to collect information about the focus groups; a flyer for advertising focus groups; and information about the NCSALL practitioner dissemination and research network.) (MN)

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Teachers' Recommendations for the NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SUMMIT Action Agenda:

A Report of Five Focus Groups Sponsored by NCSALL's Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network

NCSALL Occasional Paper
September 2000

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy
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September, 2000

INTRODUCTION

On February 14 and 15, 2000, a National Adult Literacy Summit held in Washington, D.C., was attended by over 100 representatives from the field of adult literacy and adult basic education: learners, teachers, program directors, policymakers, researchers, state- and federal-level administrators, as well as congressional, corporate and non-profit friends of the field. The purpose of the Summit was to continue the process of developing a broad vision and a set of action steps for moving the field of adult literacy forward in its efforts to provide high-quality, accessible adult learning services to all adults in the U.S.

During the Summit, participants spent a full day reviewing a draft vision statement and priority statements and providing feedback for improving a proposed action agenda. At the end of the Summit, all participants were encouraged to find a way to draw more members of the field into the discussion, so that as many stakeholders as possible would have an opportunity to influence the agenda. Between February and June 30, participants were encouraged to sponsor opportunities for practitioners in the field to meet and provide feedback on the draft action agenda. Between June 30 and September 7, 2000, when the action agenda was formally introduced, the Summit organizers (who include the National Institute for Literacy, the Department of Education, the National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy, the National Coalition for Literacy, and others) worked to incorporate all of the feedback from practitioners around the country into the final action agenda.

NCSALL, as a co-sponsor of the Summit, felt that it should do its part by bringing together groups of teachers to read the action agenda, engage in a discussion together about it, and provide their own recommendations about the vision and the action steps needed for the field. Focus groups were organized in five of the states where NCSALL sponsors the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network, a network of adult literacy practitioners who help make the connection in their states between practitioners and NCSALL's researchers. (A further description of the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (PDRN) is included in the Appendix.)

In each of the five states, the PDRN Practitioner Leader conducted a three-hour focus group, using a common format developed by the PDRN. This format gave teachers the opportunity to talk about the vision statement proposed in the Draft Action Agenda and the eight priority action steps being recommended. The results from each focus group (in the form of newsprints used to record the discussions during the focus groups) were collated, transcribed, and analyzed to find common recommendations for improving the Action Agenda.

What follows is a brief description of the focus group methodology, a summary of findings of the five focus groups (common recommendations emerging from them), and conclusions for the Summit organizers to consider in implementing the Action Agenda. An appendix provides more information about how the focus groups were advertised and conducted, as well as specific comments made by teachers during each of the focus groups.

It is our hope that the perspectives and recommendations of these 29 adult literacy teachers will contribute to the evolution of the vision and agenda for the field. We are also pleased to have provided teachers with an opportunity to have a voice and play a role in the important process of moving the field forward. We congratulate the Practitioner Leaders in the five states (Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia) who conducted these focus groups so ably.

METHODOLOGY

Each focus group met once for 3 hours. Focus group facilitators (PDRN Practitioner Leaders) advertised the focus group and identified 5-6 teachers to participate. Practitioner Leaders looked for a diverse group in terms of type of program (community-based, school-based, library, etc), role (ESOL, GED, ABE, etc.), and race and geographical distribution within the state.

A total of 29 teachers participated in the five focus groups. Overall, the group was predominantly female and fairly homogenous in terms of race: three African-American participants, two Latino participants, and 24 White participants. A good geographical distribution was achieved (across the region and within states), and a wide range of roles was represented. The make-up of the group is described in Table 1.

Participating teachers were paid a $50 stipend for their time and travel; Practitioner Leaders were also paid for their time as facilitators. Prior to the focus group, participating teachers were mailed the Draft Action Agenda as well as the Summit background document and were instructed to read the Draft Action Agenda before the focus group meeting.

Table 1: Participant Breakdown by State

	Participant	Role (type of teaching)	Gender	Race
Virginia	1	GED	F	White
	2	ABE	F	White
	3	Pre- GED	F	White
	4	GED	F	White
	5	ABE/GED	F	White
Pennsylvania	6	ABE/GED	F	African-American
	7	Workplace ABE/GED	F	White
	8	ESOL	F	White
	9	ABE/GED	M	African-American
	10	ABE	F	White
Massachusetts	11	ESOL/ABE correctional fac.	F	White
	12	Family Literacy	F	White
	13	Native Language Literacy	F	Latina
	14	ABE/GED	F	White
	15	ESOL	F	White
	16	Workplace ABE/GED	F	White
	17	ESOL	F	White
Maine	18	Family Literacy	F	White
	19	ABE/GED/ESOL	F	White
	20	ABE/GED Correctional fac.	F	White
	21	GED, ESOL	F	White
	22	ABE/GED	F	White
	23	ABE	F	White
Delaware	24	GED	M	White
	25	ABE	M	White
	26	ESOL	F	White
	27	Special Education/ABE	F	White
	28	Family Literacy	F	Latina
	29	ABE/GED	F	African-American

Focus groups were deliberately designed so that they did not need to be tape recorded yet the facilitator would not have to take copious notes while facilitating. PDRN Coordinators, however, needed a common way for documenting the group discussions so that the information could be collated across all five groups. To do this, newsprint was used as the prime vehicle for recording recommendations and comments of the group.

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The first step in the focus group, after introducing the participants to each other, reviewing the purpose of the group and the agenda, and setting the ground rules, was to discuss the two versions of the vision statement presented in the Summit Draft Action Agenda. Both versions were presented on a sheet of newsprint. Participants were asked to read the versions, form pairs, and discuss in their pairs which of the versions they thought best, or to propose an alternative version of the vision statement. When the group reconvened, each pair reported back on which version of the statement they preferred or stated their new alternative version. After this, the group as a whole voted on which vision statement they would support. This was noted on the newsprint.

The bulk of the focus group meeting was devoted to discussing the 8 priority action steps listed in the Draft Action Agenda. All 8 priority action steps were presented by the facilitator, each on a separate sheet of newsprint. After some discussion, each participant ranked the 8 steps according to which s/he thought were most important for the field. This ranking was counted, producing the top three priority action steps. These three were then discussed further in two small groups by rotating the newsprint on which the action step was written and asking each group to write their recommendations for revising or adding new specific actions. All comments from the groups were recorded on the newsprint and reviewed by the whole group at the end.

At the end, ten minutes was allotted for open discussion, to allow each person to make final comments about specific priority steps or about the Draft Action Agenda as a whole. The facilitator did take notes in this part of the meeting.

After the end of the focus group, the Practitioner Leaders sent the newsprints and notes from the meeting to the PDRN Coordinators, who typed them, collated them across all groups, and identified themes common across all groups. Those results are reported below.

RESULTS

The focus groups produced two primary results: their versions of what the vision and goal of the Summit agenda should be and their choice of the most important strategies . They also added to and commented on the action steps in these strategy areas.

Vision and Goal

The vision and goal is the heart of the Action Agenda. Each of the five focus groups reached consensus on a different version of that goal, and we report all five here. Pennsylvania and Virginia adapted the draft goal calling for a system of high quality literacy services. Maine and Massachusetts chose to combine the two Summit vision statements. Delaware chose to completely rewrite the vision statement.

Pennsylvania
Adults in every community in the US will have the opportunity to benefit from a collaborative system of high quality literacy services that helps them reach their full potential as workers, family members, and lifelong learners. (Received 6 of 6 votes)

Virginia
Adults in every community in the US will be offered the opportunity to benefit from a system of quality literacy services that help them reach their full potential as workers, family members, citizens and lifelong learners. (5 of 5 votes)

Maine
By the year 2020, 70% of the population will achieve literacy at or above NALS level 3 by a system of high-quality literacy services that help them reach their full potential as workers, family members, citizens, and lifelong learners. (Received 6 of 6 votes)

Massachusetts
By the year 2010, adults in every community in the US will have access to a system of quality literacy services which accommodate diverse learners to help them reach their full potential as workers, family members, citizens and lifelong learners. (Received 4 of 6 votes)

Delaware
Formalize and standardize an adult education system that is integrated into the formal education system between K-12 and higher education.

Strategies for Action

After they determined the vision and goal (The groups noted the lack of clarity around these terms in the draft), the focus groups determined which of the strategies for action listed in the Draft Action Agenda they found to be their top three priorities. Their choices are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Top Three Strategy Choices by State

	Strategy 1 Include Learner's Perspectives	Strategy 2 Commitment to Access	Strategy 3 Instructional and Program Quality Improvements	Strategy 4 Professional Development Opportunities	Strategy 5 Incorporate Technology	Strategy 6 Create Partnerships	Strategy 7 Increase Research	Strategy 8 Communication Strategies
Massachusetts	1st			3rd		2nd		
Delaware		3rd	2nd	1st				
Virginia	3rd		1st	2nd				
Pennsylvania	2nd		3rd			1st		
Maine			2nd	1st		3rd		

•participants in each state were asked to vote on their top three choices

9

10

Five strategies were identified as a top priority by at least one of the groups, with a concentration on Strategy 1 (Include Learners' Perspectives), Strategy 3 (Make Instructional and Program Quality a Cornerstone), Strategy 4 (Establish a Comprehensive Network of Professional Development Opportunities), and Strategy 6 (Create Partnerships).

The data in Table 3 show that Strategy 3 (Instructional Program Quality) received most votes. Strategy 5 (Incorporate Technology) and Strategy 7 (Increase Research) received the lowest priorities.

Table 3: Mean Vote Across States for Each

	Strat. 1	Strat. 2	Strat. 3	Strat. 4	Strat. 5	Strat. 6	Strat. 7	Strat. 8
Pennsylvania	3.17	2.50	3.00	0.33	0.83	3.67	0.00	1.5
Delaware	1.17	2.17	3.67	3.83	0.50	0.83	1.50	1.33
Maine	1.33	0.17	3.50	4.17	0.83	2.33	1.67	1.00
Virginia	2.80	1.60	3.80	3.00	1.80	1.20	0.60	0.20
Massachusetts	5.00	1.57	1.29	2.57	0.43	3.00	1.14	0.00
OVERALL	**2.69**	**1.6**	**3.05**	**2.78**	**.88**	**2.21**	**.98**	**.81**

5= highest priority, 0 = lowest priority

Strategy 3 has the highest mean at 3.05, followed closely by Strategy 4 at 2.78 and Strategy 1 at 2.69.

After the groups identified the strategies they believed had highest priority, they examined the action steps associated with those strategies more closely. They made suggestions for revisions and added and eliminated some steps. The groups also found action steps that addressed more than one strategy. The suggestions made by each group for each action step are reported in Appendix 1.

CONCLUSIONS

The summary document of the National Literacy Summit 2000, *From Margins to the Mainstream: An Action Agenda for Literacy* (The National Institute for Literacy, 2000) was released in September. This agenda is built around three priorities:

> A system of QUALITY services for adult students.
> Ease of ACCESS to these services.
> Sufficient RESOURCES to support quality and access. (NIFL, p.3)

The agenda also states outcomes that describe the achievement of the priorities and a variety of sample action steps that move toward each outcome. The goal of the agenda is:

> By 2010, a system of high quality adult literacy, language, and lifelong learning services will help adults in every community make measurable gains toward achieving their goals as family members, workers, citizens, and lifelong learners. (NIFL, p.1)

From Margins to the Mainstream incorporates suggestions from hundreds of stakeholders. It addresses many of the concerns of the PDRN focus group members. The goal stresses quality, as did the goals articulated by the focus groups. The three strategies given most priority by the focus group members--including learners' perspectives, focusing on quality, and providing comprehensive professional development--are found in the outcomes of the Quality Priority of the *Agenda*. Creating partnerships, the fourth priority of the focus groups, supports the entire *Agenda* and is included in outcomes relating to building quality, providing access, and developing resources.

The thinking of the twenty-nine teachers in the PDRN focus groups is in most ways in line with the work of the developers of *From Margins to the Mainstream*. These teachers' focus was on inclusion of students and on quality. The next steps for all of us who support the Agenda are to build the partnerships and advocacy work needed to reach the goal.

The teachers in the PDRN focus groups have indicated strong support for change, especially if there is an emphasis on the inclusion of students and teachers in determining the way. The *Agenda* will be a powerful tool to move the field forward if mechanisms can be found to support the involvement of teachers who are mostly part-time and students who are currently unconnected to improvement efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The focus group guide was designed by Cristine Smith, Judy Hofer, and Beth Bingman. The focus groups were conducted by Pam Meader, Nicole Graves, Susan Bubp, Susan Finn Miller, and Sue Barton. The State Literacy Resource Centers in these states also provided support for recruitment and logistics. The information from the focus group was organized by Sam Gordenstein, Amelia Kirby and Beth Bingman. The report was written by Cristine Smith and Beth Bingman.

APPENDIX

This appendix includes:

- Focus Group Notes on Action Steps
- NCSALL Focus Group Guide: Feedback for National Literacy Summit Action Agenda
- Flyer For Advertising Focus Group
- Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network

Focus Group Notes on Action Steps

We have gathered the comments from the four most popular Priority Strategies (as determined by the Focus Groups) and divided them into two groupings: the first consists of comments on/additions to the priority strategy, and the second grouping consists of more specific comments alluding to a given action step. Some of the action steps received no comments. The parentheses identifies the focus group making the comment.

Priority Strategy 1:

Include learners' perspectives in making change

Focus group comments/additions on this strategy:

- "The word 'practitioner' needs to be added to 'learner' in the wording of the strategy." (Massachusetts)
- "Needs to be rewritten as 'Involve learners in instructional programming.' "(Virginia)
- "Barriers to including learners in decision-making include negative attitude(from previous experience), erratic attendance, and scaring them off because of high-level thinking and vocabulary (Virginia)
- "Use learner experiences to help shape the process of instruction and program improvement."(Pennsylvania)
- "Need active involvement by students in governmental activities that impact adult education and literacy locally, statewide, and nationally." (Pennsylvania)
- "Learners can conduct their own research to inform the field." (Pennsylvania)
- "If learner is expected to contribute, they should be compensated for their contribution." (Virginia)

Specific comments on Action Steps:

To increase learner involvement, require all federally-funded adult education and literacy programs to have an adult learner on staff or on the Board of Directors.

Involve learners in advisory board functions

- "Adult learners should be included, where appropriate, on policy- making boards." (Delaware)

Solicit regular/frequent feedback on program quality.

- "Solicit regular/frequent feedback on program quality through focus groups, surveys, learners doing their own research in community and among each other." (Pennsylvania)

Get learner input before implementing changes in programs/services.

- "Help learners to define their goals toward making program curriculum changes." (Pennsylvania)

Provide opportunities for learners to help one another through support groups, mentoring and informal counseling relationships, etc.

- "Involve learners in mentoring one another." (Pennsylvania)
- "Have students (GED graduates) speak in schools (junior high) and talk about how difficult GED test is and how important it is to stay in school. Adult learners can connect to and provide service to public education." (Pennsylvania)
- "We especially like this action step" (Virginia)

Hire former students to recruit and provide guidance to new students.

- "Have students speak at orientation for new learners." (Pennsylvania)
- "This is putting responsibility on the students that they may not be able to handle." (Virginia)

Priority Strategy 3:

Make instructional and program quality improvements a cornerstone of the adult education and literacy system

Focus Group comments/additions on this strategy:

- "We think the following bullets should be added 'Provide varied instructional methods based on best practices and informed research for all adult learners' and 'Provide appropriate instruction for LD and/or English language adult learners' ." (Delaware)
- "The action steps should be numbered to minimize confusion." (Maine)
- "Too many action steps. It would have been useful if a committee had systematized and categorized them." (Virginia)
- "It's necessary to incorporate professional development into this strategy if program quality is the 'cornerstone'. " (Pennsylvania)
- "Add the following bullet 'Increase funding to provide support to program funds to support quality efforts and to learner funds to provide/assist with transportation, child care, career/life planning' ." (Pennsylvania)
- "Add the following bullet 'Increase funding to provide coordination and collaboration of services including funding for at risk secondary students in the public schools'." (Pennsylvania)

- "Add the following bullet 'Increase funding to provide professional development focusing on LD with emphasis on getting diagnosis and applying recommendations to the learning'." (Pennsylvania)
- "All literacy providers should not be funded unless they meet program quality standards." (Pennsylvania)
- "The word 'improvement' implies that we are not doing the best job that we can; strike the word 'improvement'." (Virginia)
- We feel that those attending the summit did not have a clear understanding of the field of special education. (Virginia)

Specific comments on Action Steps:

Create partnerships among federal departments (e.g., rehab, social services, TANF), and allow them to overlap and cross-train to provide seamless services.

- "Very important action step." (Maine)

Utilize other delivery methods and systems in addition to traditional classroom training. This includes forward-looking modes of instruction, such as web TV and distance learning, as well as mentoring, tutors, and on-the-job training.

Disseminate "best practices" for adults with LD in a systematic fashion with a variety of populations in different program settings (ED, Labor, One-Stops, etc.). Provide adequate technical assistance and support for this. Different program regulations for LD conflict with one another to the detriment of students. Regulations need to be brought into alignment.

- "We think this action step should be emphasized." (Delaware)
- "Change wording to 'Disseminate best practices for all adults, including LD, in a systematic fashion…' ." (Maine)

Devise a comprehensive approach to service delivery for LD students – from intake to placement to exit.

- "Change wording to 'Devise…service delivery for all, including LD…'. " (Maine)

Assure that program standards address the time needs of the LD population.

Assure that programs meet the needs of women whose LD was undetected in childhood

- "Replace the word 'women' with 'all'. "(Maine)
- "Took issue with this action step; our group has two special education teachers who don't believe that research proves women were underserved and unidentified." (Virginia)

Develop a systematic approach to quality improvement, including adoption of quality standards and focus on teaching and learning.

- "We like this action step." (Delaware)

Maintain literacy and language programs that support learning across many environments (school, work, home) via teachers, tutors, and technology.

- "Very important" (Maine)

Encourage literacy providers to develop and commit to benchmarks for high quality results.

Set a goal for the US for the next international assessment – where do we want to be, and when should we be there?

- "There needs to be national consensus first!" (Maine)

Articulate the relationship of the adult education system to the standards/skills requirements of K-12 and higher education systems, including the relationship between children's achievement of standards and the parents' ability to help them.

- "Articulate the relationship of adult education system to the K-12 and higher education systems, including parent/child relationship (K-A system)." (Maine)
- "We feel that adult education should be separated from K-12 and set up a new Department of Adult Education." (Virginia)

Provide opportunities to learn standards/program quality.

- "Poorly worded as is." (Maine)

Show accountability for programs.

Invest in student assessment and outcome measurement system that captures meaningful data beyond reading level gains. Assessment system would include skill certification and validate program outcomes.

- "We really like this statement" (Virginia)

Reconcile system goals and learner goals (National Reporting System and Equipped for the Future).

- "Need to add 'across all agencies, inter-organizational' (common frame of reference)." (Maine)
- "We really like this statement" (Virginia)

Assure that programs contribute to and use research data bank

Systematically test different delivery systems.

- "We like this action step." (Delaware)
- "Does this mean field test them? (Virginia)

Assure that programs address learner barriers such as lack of child care, transportation, and career/life planning issues.

- "Other agencies could help with this. There needs to be funding to support these ideas." (Virginia)

Help all programs develop the capacity (facilities, support services, staff, materials) to deliver quality services.

Develop a systematic approach to quality improvement, including adoption of quality standards and focus on teaching and learning

Increase adult education funding to at least half the per-child funding for K-12.

- "This action step or the last one 'Assure that this…' , use the higher $ of the two ." (Maine)

Develop sufficient economic and human resources at the federal, state, and local levels. Come up with resources to support higher quality services and learner outcomes.

Make federal and state funding available to all literacy providers. This will recognize the importance of including all kinds of providers in order to meet different learner needs.

Assure that this higher quality is supported by funding for services that is based on a higher per learner cost formula (no less than $3,000 per learner, adjusted).

- "Very important" (Maine)

Priority Strategy 4:

Establish a comprehensive network of professional development opportunities so all adult education educators can gain and regularly upgrade appropriate skills and knowledge.

Focus Group comments/additions on this strategy:

- "Adult educators need access to research." (Delaware)
- "ESOL was left out of most action steps." (Delaware)
- "Tutors are not considered teachers; if we want to include all those in adult education, we need to use the term adult educators." (Delaware)
- "The reality is that there is not enough networking on a daily basis- we are isolated and only meet a few times a year." (Virginia)
- "Action steps are redundant." (Virginia)

Specific comments on action steps:

Fund continuing professional development (maybe with a minimum percent of budget).

- "Add the following 'build in available time and money amount allotted per teacher per year; grant writing takes time'." (Maine)
- "End the sentence with 'development'." (Maine)

Use the good research available to help train teachers in how to effectively identify, place, and teach LD students. Teachers need access to research on best practices, and training in how to apply them, especially areas such as LD and ESOL.

Promote professionalization and adequate program staffing, including full-time, well-paid staff and professional development.

- "Change 'professionalization' to 'professional'." (Maine)
- "Professionalizing this field is not the same as establishing professional development opportunities. A lot is missing in this paragraph huge gaps in reporting what happened at the summit." (Virginia)

Provide a grant to create an adult education "certification" curriculum, including:
How to use technology effectively in adult education
How to integrate learners into program planning
How to teach learners to use technology.

- "Replace the word 'grant' with 'money/opportunity'." (Maine)
- "Needs clarity" (Maine)
- "As in higher education, teachers are being created with certification yet education schools have been collapsed into other departments, and those who are teaching can't teach very well. They know their topic but not how to teach it." (Virginia)
- "Is certification a requirement for declaring adult educators qualified? We think not."(Virginia)
- "We have no benefits"(Virginia)
- "Although we work out of the community college, we are not even recognized as community college faculty."(Virginia)
- "We would like to be paid better as a part time employee and also paid for all the outside things [work] that we do (more lesson planning time, more participatory management time)." (Virginia)

Create a comprehensive system of professional development to meet the needs of a diverse profession and delivery system that includes both degree and non-degree, pre-service and in-service training related to management and instruction. This system must include funding to enable access for all providers (including teachers, volunteers, program directors, state staff, counselors, etc.).

Teach instructors in the appropriate use of instructional technology and current applications.

- "Combine this action step with the fourth one." (Maine)

Assure that instructors feel capable of choosing and using effective approaches to help learners achieve their goals.

Offer professional development that is guided by research.

- "Combine with the first action step." (Maine)

Priority Strategy 6:

Create partnerships with other literacy providers and local organizations to help develop an adult education and literacy system

Focus Group comments/additions on this strategy:

- "Action steps should be numbered." (Maine)
- "Need to design process to address the need to foster a 'community spirit', to create a context to make explicit some of the territorial issues, develop a plan of action which will identify strengths and possibilities for best serving the community, and create need for everyone to have a vested interest in collaborating." (Pennsylvania)
- "Consider the whole student and their own context for learning in developing partnerships." (Pennsylvania)
- "Consider the social context of the learners and their experiences and needs including their cultural experiences in the system." (Pennsylvania)
- "Teacher must know their community and what is available to adult learners" (Pennsylvania)
- "Programs are being asked to do more with less, partnerships will help programs define their expertise and not feel compelled to be everything to everyone." (Pennsylvania)

Specific comments on action steps:

Identify and involve partners early for all new initiatives (organized labor, ALA, etc.); assure stakeholder buy-in.

- "This raised awareness and leads to action by employers and workers regarding the benefits of continuing education regardless of the wealth of the economy." (Maine)
- "Add somewhere 'educate the stakeholder regarding process of reading' ie: direct instruction, assessment, length of time to improve, etc... Teaching LD student to be an advocate for himself." (Maine)

Create broad incentives for workplace literacy, with employers involved as partners in collaborations. Seek tax credits for the private sector to work with literacy organizations to create real world literacy instruction (i.e. health literacy).

- "Need employer input regarding the skills they are looking for." (Maine)
- "Provide tax incentives to employers providing real world literacy (i.e: health) (Maine)
- "Encourage employers to develop incentives for employees to enable them to participate in workplace educational programs." (Massachusetts)

Form partnerships with others, private/public, who are committed to providing access, with an eye on inclusiveness for all lifelong learners.

- "This gets into territory issues. How to reconcile different agendas/missions? Partnerships should include directors, educators, students, employers, employees and community members. Provision for ample time and money with which to participate." (Maine)
- "Clarify 'inclusiveness'. Racism? Gender bias?" (Maine)
- "Delete this action step and the last action and create the following one: 'Develop, maintain, and broaden partnerships with community colleges and other post-secondary institutions to provide services and training to adults and to mentor learners emerging from literacy programs'." (Massachusetts)

Work with community colleges and other post-secondary institutions to assure they provide services to adults with LD.

- "Partnerships must be established that provide assessment and diagnosis for adults who have learning disabilities (heavy on recommendations)." (Pennsylvania)
- "Replace 'LD' with 'all learners'." (Virginia)

Develop, maintain, and broaden partnerships with community colleges to provide services and training to adults.

NCSALL Focus Group Guide: Feedback for National Summit Draft Action Agenda

5-6 teachers
3 hours

Introduction

What is a focus group? A focus group is a group of up to 10 people (in this case, 5 or 6 teachers) who come together to provide input on a particular topic. Focus groups are really a research or information-gathering methodology. It's a way to get people's opinions, document people's experiences or gather their ideas. Focus groups are usually organized by a researcher or someone who wants to find out information from others and doesn't want to do a questionnaire or a survey to get the information.

Focus groups are not intended as trainings or workshops for the people who come. While participants in a focus group may learn from each other as they talk, the primary purpose is for the facilitator or researcher to learn from the group. It is usually organized by inviting 5-10 people who share a common interest or role and asking them questions about their experience or their opinions.

Since the objective of the focus group is to gather information, the discussions that go on in focus groups need to be "recorded" in some fashion so that the information from the group can be compiled with information from other groups. In this case, the opinions and consensus of the group will be recorded in newsprints so that you, the facilitator, do not need to either tape record or keep detailed handwritten notes as you are trying to facilitate. The newsprints from your group will then be forwarded by you directly to NCSALL for compiling and sending on to the Summit organizers, without you having to retype or format. This does mean, however, that the newsprints from your group should be legible to those of us who were not present.

The focus group is a form of research or information gathering, so they are systematic. They are always well planned out, with carefully thought-out and worded questions, an agenda and an order for the focus group activities. The focus group does not need, however, to be overly serious or dry; people should be encouraged to relax, laugh and enjoy themselves.

Prior to the Focus Group Meeting

Each participant should be sent the one-page "National Literacy Summit 2000" overview, the 10-page Draft Action Agenda at least 10 days before the focus group meeting, and the 23-page "Literacy Skills for 21st Century America: A Blueprint for Creating a More Literate Nation", with instructions to read the one-page overview and the 10-page Draft Action Agenda before the focus group meeting.

Each participant will receive a stipend of $50 for their participation in the meeting. No extra funds are available for travel. You should hand out the blue "consultant payment form" sheets for people to sign and return at the end of the meeting; you will then forward these to Sam Gordenstein at World Education.

Steps for Facilitating the Focus Group for Input to the Summit

1. Welcome, introductions (whole group, 10 minutes): Welcome everyone to the focus group. Ask each person to introduce themselves, stating their program, what they teach, and whether they've ever been part of a focus group before. Keep notes to yourself as people introduce themselves, so that you can send the basic information to NCSALL after the focus group. There is a form at the end of this guide for you to send in to us.

2. Purpose, agenda and ground rules/discussion of focus group format (whole group, 15 minutes): Post the following newsprint with information about the purpose of the focus group, and talk it through with the group:

> PURPOSE
>
> To provide input to the Summit process about your opinions on the vision/goal statements, priority strategies, and action steps for moving the field of adult literacy forward.
>
> AGENDA
>
> Setting ground rules and discussing focus group format
> Discussing the vision/goal statements
> Discussing the priority strategies and action steps
> Wrap-up

Ask if anyone in the group has ever been part of a "focus group" before. If so, ask them to say very briefly what that experience was like. Were they nervous?etc. Explain (but not read) the following points about focus groups:

- The purpose of a focus group is to get information and ideas from you. Your experience is valid. NCSALL is interested in hearing what you have to say, and there is no one "right" answer.

- The goal of the focus group is to hear equally from everyone. It won't just be one large discussion for 3 hours; there will be a variety of activities, and sometimes you will work in small groups, sometimes there will be an open discussion, and

sometimes everyone will be asked individually to say what they think. We encourage people to monitor themselves so that everyone gets a chance to talk in open discussions.

- The information from this focus group will be used by the Summit Steering Committee to make changes to the Draft Action Agenda. NCSALL will compile the opinions from this focus group with opinions from people in other focus groups, and send the overall opinions to the Summit Steering Committee before June 30.

- All information from this focus group will be confidential; that is, no one's name or the name of their program will ever be written in the notes.

- The primary form of record will be the newsprints that this group generates.

In all groups, whether they are focus groups or trainings, it is important for the group to follow some agreed-upon ground rules for discussion. Post the following newsprint and explain that these are a few ground rules that you are suggesting the group follow:

GROUND RULES

- Everyone tries to contribute equally. We want to hear from everyone.
- Try not to interrupt others. Listen carefully to what others are saying.
- Ask questions about the process if at any time you are confused about what we're doing or why.

Ask the group if they have other ground rules they would like to contribute. Write these up on the newsprint as people say them. This should take no longer than 3-4 minutes, then move on.

3. Discussion of vision statements (pairs then whole group, 30 minutes): The purpose of this activity is to reach a majority opinion on a vision/goal statement for the field. The agreed-upon statement can be one of the two in the draft action agenda, a modification of these, or a totally new vision/goal statement.

Post the following newsprint:

VISION STATEMENTS

By the year 2010, the U.S. will be the most literate nation in the world, with 70% of the population achieving literacy at or above the NALS Level 3.

Adults in every community in the U.S. will benefit from a system of high-quality literacy services that helps them reach their full potential as workers, family members, citizens and lifelong learners.

Explain that these statements came out of the Summit, and the field needs to decide what statement should drive its work. This could be one of these statements or an alternative (a modified version of one of these, or a new statement). Ask participants to turn to the person next to them (to form pairs) and discuss the vision statements listed on the newsprint. They can talk about which one they like, or they could propose an alternative statement (either a modification of one of these or a totally new statement). In their pairs (10 minutes), they should prepare to come back to the whole group with their proposed vote or their alternative statement. Tell them that if they wish to propose an alternative statement, they should come back to the whole group with the EXACT wording of the alternative they propose.

Reconvene the whole group. Ask each pair whether they agreed upon one of these two statements or whether they have an alternative statement to propose. If they have an alternative statement, they should read it and you should write it on the "vision statement" newsprint. Continue to ask each pair to report back, writing up any alternative statements that are proposed (if additional room is needed, start a new sheet of newsprint).

Then, hand out one "sticky dot" (or a marker for making a dot on the newsprint) to each participant and ask them stick their dot next to the vision/goal statement which they most feel should drive the field. After all participants have voted, count the dots and circle the statement that got the most votes. Tell participants that you will send this newsprint on to NCSALL to tally with other the votes from other focus groups and send on to the Summit Steering Committee.

4. Discussion of priority strategies and action steps (whole group, 70 minutes): The purpose of this activity is to get the group's input about the main strategies and action steps that were generated during the Summit. Post the following 8 newsprints:

1. INCLUDE LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES IN MAKING CHANGE.
- To increase learner involvement, require all federally-funded adult education and literacy programs to have an adult learner on staff or on the Board of Directors.
- Involve learners in advisory board functions.
- Solicit regular/frequent feedback on program quality.
- Get learner input before implementing changes in programs/services....

(MORE ACTION STEPS LISTED IN DRAFT ACTION AGENDA)

2. BALANCE A COMMITMENT TO ACCESS WITH A CONCERN FOR DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING PROGRAM QUALITY.
- Help learners access the appropriate technology for learning at home, work, community, church, etc.
- Make technical assistance available to learners.
- Recruit more effectively among targeted populations.
- Develop a resource and referral system among providers so learners can be matched with services they need....

(MORE ACTION STEPS LISTED IN DRAFT ACTION AGENDA)

3. MAKE INSTRUCTIONAL AND PROGRAM QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS A CORNERSTONE OF THE ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY SYSTEM.
- Create partnerships among federal departments (e.g., rehab, social services, TANF), and allow them to overlap and cross-train to provide seamless services.
- Utilize other delivery methods and systems in addition to traditional classroom training.
- Disseminate "best practices" for adults with LD in a systematic fashion with a variety of populations in different program settings.
- Develop a systematic approach to quality improvement, including adoption of quality standards and focus on teaching and learning....

(MORE ACTION STEPS LISTED IN DRAFT ACTION AGENDA)

4. ESTABLISH A COMPREHENSIVE NETWORK OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES SO ALL ADULT EDUCATORS CAN GAIN AND REGULARLY UPGRADE APPROPRIATE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE.

- Fund continuing professional development (maybe with a minimum percent of budget).
- Use the good research available to help train teachers in how to effectively identify, place and teach LD students.
- Promote professionalization and adequate program staffing, including full-time well paid staff, and professional development.
- Create a comprehensive system of professional development to meet the needs of a diverse professional and delivery system that includes both degree and non-degree, pre-service and in-service training related to management and instruction....

(MORE ACTION STEPS LISTED IN DRAFT ACTION AGENDA)

5. INCORPORATE TECHNOLOGY INTO ALL EFFORTS TO INCREASE ACCESS, STRENGTHEN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL AND PROGRAM QUALITY.

- Publicize/make widely available examples of successful use of technology in curricula.
- Assure that all programs have appropriate technology.
- Incorporate assistive technology into instructional programs for adults with LD.
- Develop information technology curriculum, training and assessment methods....

(MORE ACTION STEPS LISTED IN DRAFT ACTION AGENDA)

6. CREATE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER LITERACY PROVIDES AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO HELP DEVELOP AN ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY SYSTEM.

- Identify and involve partners early for all new initiatives (organized labor, American Library Association, etc.); assure stakeholder buy-in.
- Create broad incentives for workplace literacy, with employers involved as partners in collaborations.
- Form partnerships with others, private/public, who are committed to providing access, with an eye on inclusiveness for all lifelong learners.
- Work with community colleges and other post-secondary institutions to assure they provide services to adults with LD...

(MORE ACTION STEPS LISTED IN DRAFT ACTION AGENDA)

7. INCREASE RESEARCH, AND ORGANIZE A NATIONAL RESEARCH AGENDA THAT EMPHASIZES PRACTITIONER INVOLVEMENT AND INFORMS TEACHING AND LEARNING.

- Identify gaps in research relating to adult education, and investigate most important areas.
- Develop a comprehensive research agenda on the impact of LD on adult learners.
- Develop a national research agenda that is practitioner-based (linked to practice), accessible, and identifies the need and interests of customers (adult learners, employers, etc.)
- Secure funding through public and private sources to conduct research on effective practice....

(MORE ACTION STEPS LISTED IN DRAFT ACTION AGENDA)

8. DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS PLANS THAT SUPPORT ACTION FOR LITERACY.

- Develop a communications strategy that underlines action, not "awareness".
- Assure that communications strategy includes literacy groups and others ratifying the action agenda.
- Create a broader strategic plan that orchestrates which organizations take responsibility for which actions, and ensure that the communications strategy support overall strategic plan.
- Hire staff to oversee development and implementation of the strategic plan....

(MORE ACTION STEPS LISTED IN DRAFT ACTION AGENDA)

Ask each person to spend no more than 1 minute to make some comment about the strategies. They would talk about the one(s) they think are most important. This activity should take no more than 10 minutes, and you, the facilitator, do not need to write anything down during this time.

Then, ask each person, on a piece of scratch paper to write the numbers 1-8 down the left side of the paper. These represent the 8 priority strategies. Ask each person to choose the five (5) strategies that they feel are most important for the field of adult literacy, the strategies that they think are most critical for moving the field forward. They should give the strategy they think is most important five points, the second most important four points, third most important three points, fourth most important two points, fifth most important 1 point; remaining three strategies get 0 points. In other words, they should

give the most points (5) to the strategy they think is most important for the field. For example, one person's scratch paper might look like this:

1. 0 points
2. 4 points
3. 2
4. 0
5. 5
6. 3
7. 0
8. 1

Allow no more than 4-5 minutes for participants to rank their top five, working silently and individually.

Stand next to the newsprint with strategy 1 on it, and ask each person to read off the number of points they gave to strategy 1. Write all of their numbers, **including the zeros**, on the top of the newsprint. For example, the newsprint with strategy 1 on it might look like this:

4, 3, 0, 2, 5, 4, 0 = 18

9. INCLUDE LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES IN MAKING CHANGE.

- To increase learner involvement, require all federally-funded adult education and literacy programs to have an adult learner on staff or on the Board of Directors.....

Then, stand next to the newsprint with strategy 2 written on it, and ask each person to read off the number of points they gave to strategy 2, writing all the numbers on the top of the strategy 2 newsprint. Continue through all eight strategies. At the end, there should be a string of numbers written at the top of each newsprint. Everyone should have "voted" or assigned points (from 0-5) to each strategy.

Add up the total for each newsprint and circle the total number of points awarded to each strategy. This should now produce a ranking of the strategies, based on the group's vote. Taking down and adding up the points for each newsprint should take no more than 5 minutes.

Take the three strategies that received the highest number of points, and use them for the next activity. RENUMBER THESE NEWSPRINTS ACCORDING TO THE POINTS ASSIGNED: HIGHEST POINTS BECOMES NEWSPRINT #1, NEXT HIGHEST POINTS BECOMES NEWSPRINT #2, AND THIRD HIGHEST POINTS BECOMES NEWSPRINTS #3. The other five strategies can stay posted on the wall.

Now, divide the whole group into two groups. Give group 1 the newsprints now numbered #1; give group 2 the newsprints now numbered #2. Ask the group to spend 10 minutes reading over the newsprint they have been given, and, with a marker, to make changes they think are appropriate. This might include: changing the phrasing of the strategy, adding action steps, changing action steps, etc. They should write right on the newsprint. Remind them to look in the Draft Action Agenda at the action steps there as well, since not all of the action steps are written on the newsprint. Also remind them that they don't need to reach consensus in their group; anything any one person says can be added to the newsprint, whether or not others in the group think it is important. Suggest to the group that they not get bogged down in discussing one particular action step, but to try to provide feedback and comments on the whole newsprint. Be sure that they WRITE DOWN their comments and changes and not just discuss them.

After 10 minutes, switch the newsprints so that group 1 now has newsprint #3 and group 2 now has newsprint #1. Give them another 10 minutes in their groups to make comments about the strategy/action step newsprint they have. After 10 minutes, switch the newsprints for a final time, so that group 1 now has newsprint #2 and group 2 now has newsprint #3. In other words, each group has had 10 minutes on each of the three newsprints. A guide to the switching of newsprints is as follows:

Round One	
Group 1	Newsprint #1
Group 2	Newsprint #2
Round Two	
Group 1	Newsprint #3
Group 2	Newsprint #1
Round Three	
Group 1	Newsprint #2
Group 2	Newsprint #3

Reconvene the whole group. Ask them to take a break and read silently all of the newsprints (5 minutes).

Finally, ask each person in the group to go around and make a final comment (in 30 seconds) about the strategies or action steps. You, as the facilitator, should try to record something about their comment on the strategy newsprint(s) at the end of their comments; please remember to make these notes LEGIBLE. These final comments should take no more than 10 minutes.

5. Concluding discussion of recommendations for the Summit Steering Group (whole group, 15 minutes) This is the final activity, and so is a time for participants to talk freely about their questions, final comments, etc. Let this be an open time for them to take the discussion in any direction that they want it to go. Your job, as the facilitator, is to take some notes on the main points of the discussion; they don't need to be verbatim notes, just "bullets" of the main ideas that people talk about.

Thank people for their participation. Explain to them that you will be sending the newsprints and notes to NCSALL, who will collate the information from this group with other focus groups and will send it along to the Summit Steering Group. NCSALL may also publish a short paper or compilation of the results, which will be posted on the NCSALL website this summer. If participants are interested in seeing what came out of all the groups, they can check the NCSALL website later in the year:

(http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall

After the Focus Group

Within a week of the focus group, please send the newsprints and notes from your focus group, along with information form about the participants, and the signed blue consultant payment forms, to Sam Gordenstein at:

World Education
44 Farnsworth Street
Boston, MA 02210

If you have any questions about what to send Sam, please contact him at (617) 482-9485.

Information Form about NCSALL Focus Groups on Summit Draft Action Agenda

Please fill out this form after your focus group and return it to Sam Gordenstein at World Education (44 Farnsworth St., Boston, MA 02210), along with the newsprint and notes, and the signed blue consultant payment forms for the participants in your group.

Name of Facilitator (Practitioner Leader): _____

Date of Focus Group: _____

Location: _____

Number of Participants: _____

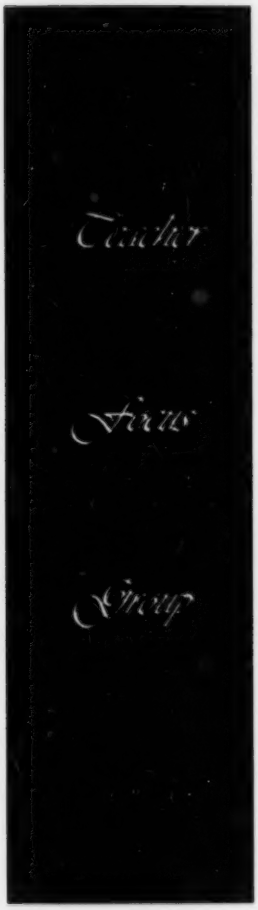
Information about participants (WE DON'T NEED NAMES):

Participant	Gender	Role (Type of Teaching: ESOL, GED, etc.)	Race
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			

Number of newsprint sheets generated by your focus group:

_____

Flyer For Advertising Focus Group



Let your voice be heard!

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP

Interested in providing feedback to the sponsors of the National Literacy Summit 2000?

In February, the National Literacy Summit 2000 was held to develop a vision and action plan to set future directions for the field of adult literacy.

Here's a chance for you to meet with other teachers and have a say.

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), one of the organizers of the Summit, is sponsoring a Focus Group in your state for ABE, ESOL and GED teachers to provide feedback to the Summit draft action plan.

- How do we support learners to have a voice in changing the field?
- What do teachers need to do the best possible job?
- How do we make sure that all programs offer high-quality services?

We are looking for 5-6 experienced teachers to participate in this 2-3 hour focus group. We hope to create a diverse focus group in terms of race, geography, and role. Participants will receive a $50 stipend to compensate them for their time and travel. Participants will be asked to read the 8-page Summit summary before coming to the focus group. Refreshments will be provided.

The date and location of the focus group is:

_____

If you would like to join the focus group, please complete this form and send it to: YOUR NAME, NCSALL Practitioner Learner, YOUR ADDRESS by DEADLINE. I can also be reached at YOUR PHONE NUMBER and YOUR E-MAIL.

Name: _____ ___ Position:

_____

Home address: _____ Home phone:_____
Work phone: _____ E-mail: _____
Race: (optional)_____ Role:
_____

Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network

The Vision

The goal of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is to conduct research that can be used to improve the quality of adult basic education in the United States and to disseminate findings in formats that teachers, program administrators, and policy makers can use. To ensure that the research meets the needs of adult basic education, NCSALL is committed to connecting research with practice and researchers with practitioners in a variety of ways. The Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (PDRN) is one way in which NCSALL links adult basic education practitioners and NCSALL researchers.

The Goal

The goal of the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network is to create and support systematic partnerships between practitioners and researchers in order to strengthen NCSALL research and make the research results available and useful to the field. The PDRN is designed to help NCSALL researchers keep a hand in the field and to help practitioners keep a hand in research. This is accomplished by asking practitioners to provide feedback to researchers and pilot-test research in the classroom; encouraging practitioners to research topics related to NCSALL and share their experiences with colleagues; connecting practitioner researchers and NCSALL researchers studying similar issues; and disseminating information about NCSALL research processes and results.

The Structure

At the heart of the PDRN are the Practitioner Leaders, adult basic education teachers who serve as liaisons between practitioners and NCSALL. Located in each of nine participating states, the Practitioner Leaders work with support from representatives of their

state Departments of Education and with their State Literacy Resource Centers to facilitate the sharing of information between practitioners and researchers. These state teams are further supported by NCSALL staff known as Regional Coordinators. Here are examples of the work Practitioners Leaders do.

- Practitioners Leaders attend conferences and facilitate staff development activities in which they share information about NCSALL-sponsored studies.
- Practitioner Leaders help NCSALL researchers identify adult basic education programs willing to be research sites.
- Practitioner Leaders keep abreast of who in their states is doing research on topics similar to those being investigated by NCSALL and assist in bringing those practitioners together with NCSALL researchers.
- Practitioner Leaders organize staff development activities to share the results of NCSALL research studies with practitioners and encourage them to test new theories or recommended practices through teacher inquiry.

The Scope

As of March 2000, fourteen Practitioner Leaders were working in three regions of the United States: the Southeast, the Northeast and the mid-Atlantic states. These Practitioner Leaders are located in Kentucky, Maine, North Carolina, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia.